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USING COMMON SENSE IN QWL

by

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I INTRODUCTION

Democratic industrial societies are now showing a deep interest in QWL. With well-educated work forces there appears to be little choice. Although each of these countries approaches QWL from a different historical starting point, there appears to be consensus that more is involved than the traditional concerns of economic justice and representative democracy, e.g. fair pay, safety and reasonable hours of work. There is also consensus about what a job should provide. For a long time QWL was expressed in purely negative terms, such as a means to produce less arduous work, cleaner work places, less bullying and less boredom. It is now increasingly expressed in more positive terms. Now identified as part of QWL are such factors as having a direct say in how the job is done, getting enough variety to allow for more learning, and being able to give and receive support on the job during the inevitable rough patches.

Central to this more modern view of QWL is the idea that a high quality of working life involves extensive learning, through the challenge of deciding how best to do a job and through workmates teaching each other on the job. All of this is very far from the traditional notions of training a worker to do what a machine is expressly built to do - a limited and fixed repertoire of performances - and then standing over him/her to make sure they do it the way they

were taught. It is also a long way from the assumption of our traditional education system that only a select few are constitutionally capable of conceptual, rational thinking and analysis.

While this is all certainly true and QWL practices do require and involve more learning than the old fragmented assembly line model, there appears to be a gap in our appreciation of the reasons for QWL and the ways in which such learning is encouraged. We frequently see a gap between preaching and practising, difficulties in maintaining our faith in our ability to learn and consequently, a heavy emphasis on, and over-use of, training and evaluation. These are not simply mistakes or problems. They are the products of a set of assumptions about how we learn. These assumptions have been systematically applied in Western culture and up until recently were rarely questioned. Because these assumptions have become unconscious beliefs, it is important that we understand them and therefore consciously avoid allowing them to intrude into our efforts to improve QWL.

Many of the difficulties they have created stem from a lack of respect for experience and common sense. This is part and parcel of the 'expert' approach. But a wide variety of experiences with QWL provide evidence that a quite different set of assumptions proves more useful. This can be described as the'common sense' approach. It follows from this that the teaching/training models still commonly employed underestimate the human ability to learn. We need to bring our assumptions about learning more into line with the evidence available, thereby improving both our capacity to learn and the quality of our working lives.

By briefly reviewing these assumptions and some international experience we may gain a fresh perspective on the needs for learning and training in the workplace.

II HOW WE LEARN

(1) Assuming the Need for an Expert

This view of learning as a result of teaching is based on the idea that we are at birth 'tabula rasas' or blank tablets. Upon these the accumulated wisdom of the ages must be inscribed. We are not believed to be capable of simply looking around us and making sense of our world. In other words, we cannot learn efficiently from our own experience. As the theory goes, we can receive from the outside world only the small, discrete bits of information related by the individual senses - sight, hearing, smell, etc. For these bits to become meaningful knowledge, they have to be logically associated with each other and integrated into abstract concepts and theories, i.e. scientific knowledge. By repeating the observation, analyzing it, making inferences or guesses about such associations and then by relegating these to memory, we gradually and painfully come to learn about the world and our place in it. Because this is obviously a difficult and tedious process, the education system is geared up to distribute the already accumulated knowledge, "the facts," and to stress the importance of memorizing these. Literacy and discipline imposed by others are both considered necessary to aid in this task. To ensure

the efficacy of this process, it is also necessary to convince individuals that their personal perceptions are inadequate to convey a meaningful picture of their worlds. Children must be rewarded for successful memorization, getting the 'right' answer and following the rules. They must be punished for any failure in these matters and any general tendency towards showing a non-conformist individual view. (Creative writing was hived off as a separate activity that one does at a particular time in a particular place.)

Over time, the educational system has been standardized by timetables, curricula and rules of behaviour for teachers and students. These serve to reinforce the notion that the teacher is the one who has it to give and the child is the one who has to receive it, dutifully and gratefully, or else! The idea that it is necessary to transfer information from an expert to a novice automatically creates two classes of people, the teachers and the taught, between whom there is a relationship of 'personal dominance.' Because, in this schooling or training system, only the teacher takes responsibility for the control and coordination of learning, by providing facts, drilling and maintaining good order, the children are effectively deskilled in the area of learning how to learn. As we have learnt from bitter experience with this system, they are also deprived of their basic curiosity and motivation to learn. For a time it was a very effective system for brainwashing us into believing that we could not validly learn without

being taught. We have been trained to place no confidence or faith in our own experience and ideas. Such a state is the essence of dependency. We come to feel the need for a great leader or expert who will protect us, not least from ourselves, and thereby guarantee us security in an unknown and dangerous world.

In these ways Western culture created for itself a monster; a structure within which all its human parts, both teachers and taught, were treated as if they were standardized, interchangeable and, to all intents and purposes, indistinguishable from one another other. They therefore became to be seen as replaceable parts. What other assumption could account for classes of thirty-five children of one age being taught the same thing at the same time, virtually all over the planet? The structure is immediately recognizable. It is, of course, a bureaucracy. The effects of bureaucracies are now well known but one effect is particularly important in the context of learning and training in QWL. Bureaucratic structures, whether they be industrial, commercial or educational, tend to produce competition and a competitive mentality. These in turn are more likely to induce the negative emotions of distress, anger, contempt and shame than the positive emotions of excitement and joy. The critical importance of the feelings associated with competition on the one hand, and cooperation on the other is clear and for those of us who hope to see some improvement in the quality of human experience, there is good news. Very simply it is this: the assumptions about human nature, and particularly those about our inabilites to make meaning of our experience are wrong.

(2) Assumptions about Common Sense

We are not, and never were, born little empty bottles to be filled up with knowledge by those who have endured the system and emerged out the other end as the winners. We are, in fact, uniquely endowed at birth with some magnificent machinery which functions to give us direct and immediate knowledge of our environment. Much of our most important knowledge does not have to be taught in the traditional sense. From birth and as we grow and develop we use our direct experience of ourselves in the world to make sense of that world, and our place in it. Far from being incompetents who must be taught to distrust our experience, we are superbly tuned learners who can place a great deal of faith in our judgments and feelings. This view of ourselves, which has never entirely died despite the best efforts of the scientific ethic of 'objective' knowledge and its handmaiden, the school system, has now been confirmed by many researchers in different fields. (Emery, F. 1980).

Learning is an inevitable function of the flux of human life; a continuing process of interaction between certain 'givens' in the way we are put together. The first is our ability to directly extract meaning from the nature of the environment. This is given by the structure of our perceptual system. Another 'given' is our inability to escape from the laws which govern our nature as social beings: our 'group life.' The structural given here is our emotional or affect system, a critical if not central

component of our health and the quality of how we function as people. Learning, far from being merely a "cognitive activity" is a function of the way we feel. The perceptual or cognitive, and the emotional aspects are also coordinated in complex ways with our motor system, the way in which we move and respond. We have a splendid set of innate reflexes through which we relate to the environment in adaptive ways.

For our purposes here we shall concentrate on the first two, our perceptual and emotional systems. Studies of the human perceptual system show that every individual is equipped and uniquely adapted at birth to directly extract information and meaning from the structure of the environment; from its objects and their interrelationship. We intuitively recognize that the environment contains stable patterns of relations, invariances, which exist and persist within the environment despite variation in individual factors.

Our species has evolved, as part of the environment, in such a way as to detect these patterns from amongst the great diversity of bits impinging on the individual senses. All our senses: sight, hearing, touch, etc., act together as a system, despite our being more conscious of some sensations than others. As the environment contains limitless information, any person with an intact perceptual system can take from it what they need. Access is restricted by habit, lack of confidence and physical or psychological isolation from the field of

information. As we move and grow up within this field we learn to detect finer patterns.

It becomes clear that 'knowledge' is better described and discussed as 'learning to know' (Polanyi, 1969). An effective education would be one which trained our perceptual system to efficiently recognize and extract the information most relevant to us at any given time. Once we grasp that learning is an innate and indivisible property and function of our being in the world, it becomes easier to translate this act of knowing into practices which enhance the probability that we will see and recognize what we need to actively adapt and survive. The central problem for education therefore ceases to be which minds or persons can achieve conceptual knowledge and add to our warehouses of this stuff, (which are already stacked full) and becomes the question of what kinds of environments best enable all minds (persons) to exercise their innate ability to perceive deeper orders of pattern and meaning.

The second "given" can best be introduced by discussing our ability to extract meaning directly from the physical environment, and from our human, social and conversational surroundings. The very young child has no difficulty distinguishing a smile from a frown and acts accordingly. Humans are in fact acutely sensitive to and knowing about each other as emotional beings and routinely employ subtle clues, whether or not they are

conscious of them.

We also have a unique capacity for spoken language and it is often forgotten that alphabetic literacy is very much a newcomer in the span of human evolution. Oral, or pre-literate cultures, were musical, celebratory and joyful (Keesing, 1979). Spoken language or conversation is still our most powerful mode of learning. It is a social cement, relating speakers to one another and to the world in which they live (Ong, 1967). We are as acutely sensitive to the many levels of message in a conversation as we are to the flickering nuances of human faces, but we simply cannot cope with the masses of information that we derive from these many powerful sources. Conversation causes bonding or togetherness which in turn generates excitement and energy and this has further consequences (Tomkins, 1963).

Our ancestors over thousands of years evolved highly sophisticated cultures in which learning was effectively pursued without benefit of literacy or bureaucracy. Teaching was done 'indirectly' through stories, song, ceremony and ritual. By participating in the life of the tribe all necessary learning about the tribe-in-its-environment was accomplished (Caudwell, 1937; Havelock, 1963). Contrary to a lot of today's mythology about 'primitive' people, these cultures were not static or unchanging. New learning was constantly being introduced by individuals and disseminated in gatherings through the 'playing out' of stories, or simply by group

conversation. The secret of the long success of these ancient societies is only now being rediscovered. They knew that the desire to learn is fired by experiences of excitement and joy. Only these positive experiences have the power to motivate people to recreate the settings in which the experiences occurred. Excitement and particularly joy generate energy which is used to create similar learning for others. Feeling excited and joyful encourages 'diffusive' learning, that which becomes widespread without having to be rigorously taught (Emery, 1982).

In their wisdom, these people knew that if capital was to be made from learning by experience, then it must be done participatively, within a group setting. Genuine group working effectively describes the marriage of the perceptual and emotional systems. And when one thinks about it, it is again only common sense. If a person feels ashamed, or has been treated with contempt for failing to get the 'right' answer even if she/he has learnt something, there is no way that this person will be in a mood to advertise that learning, let alone attempt to recreate the conditions under which it was learnt. Under the cast-iron laws of our emotional system we attempt to maximize our positive feelings and minimize our pain. While a child, or an adult may not learn very much of the content which is being poured into him or her, nothing can prevent that person from learning directly the supposedly hidden and unpleasant meaning of being treated with contempt as a failure or a second

class citizen. If we are to create a responsible Learning Society , we must learn to create settings in which excitement and joy flow from acknowledging and constructively using our perceptions of the world around us. This is the promise of QWL - the creation of circumstances which encourage and support the confidence to practice all these abilities.

III QWL AS A PROCESS OF LEARNING

If QWL is to fulfil this promise it must wholeheartedly endorse all the principles of the common sense learning approach. If it is not to become 'compulsory' democracy or democratization by default or neglect (Crombie, 1978), leadership must institute common sense processes of introduction and implementation which are common sense.

Changes will be cosmetic unless they change the job from a 'stick and carrot' affair to something that is intrinsically interesting. No job is going to remain interesting unless it allows for continual learning, a constant build up of skill and understanding. Similarly, no one is going to find any challenge, any intrinsic interest, in a job where he/she cannot find out whether they are making progress; whether their new way of doing things is an improvement or has created more problems.

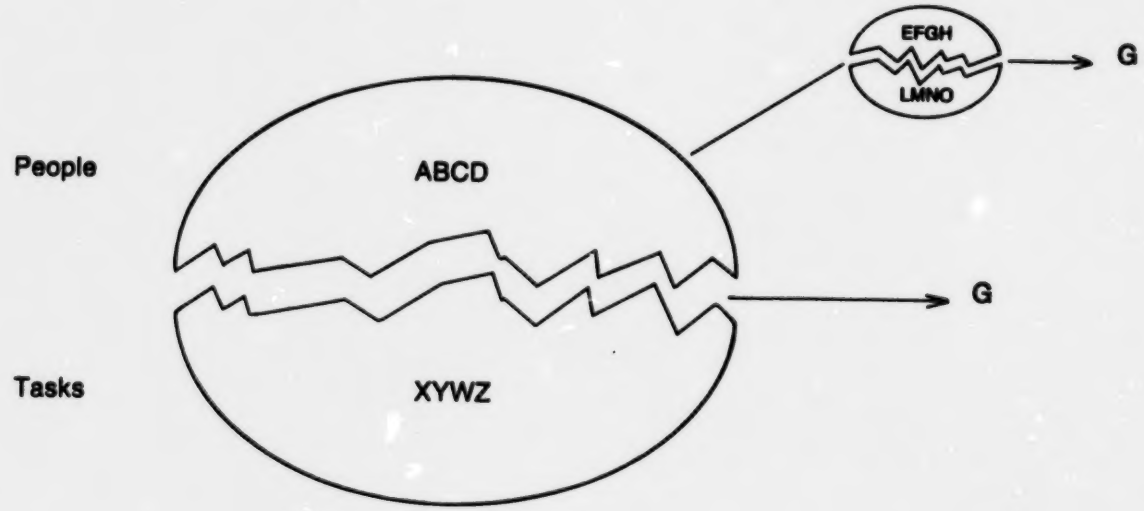
Individuals must then be able to raise their level of aspiration at their own pace, as they learn more. Whatever the level of task, workers must get an honest and timely feedback of results. Bureaucratic structures cannot create these conditions, and therefore cannot provide a learning environment (Emery & Emery, 1976).

Learning environments are intrinsically motivating. Within them individuals can begin to learn how best they personally do learn, and in which directions this learning can most satisfactorily take them. Among the ways in which QWL has been defined, there is a hard core of meaning in the idea that people should not be used or considered as replaceable parts or cogs in a machine. The creation of such learning environments is a pre-requisite to acknowledging human individuality, dignity and responsibility. As we are social animals our responsibilities to each other for growth and development include the creation of and support for such environments.

The essence of QWL can therefore, in organizational terms, be boiled down to the structure illustrated in figure I. This shows a group of people who, having accepted responsibility for achieving a goal, "G", are in the process of learning how to use and develop all their resources and abilities.

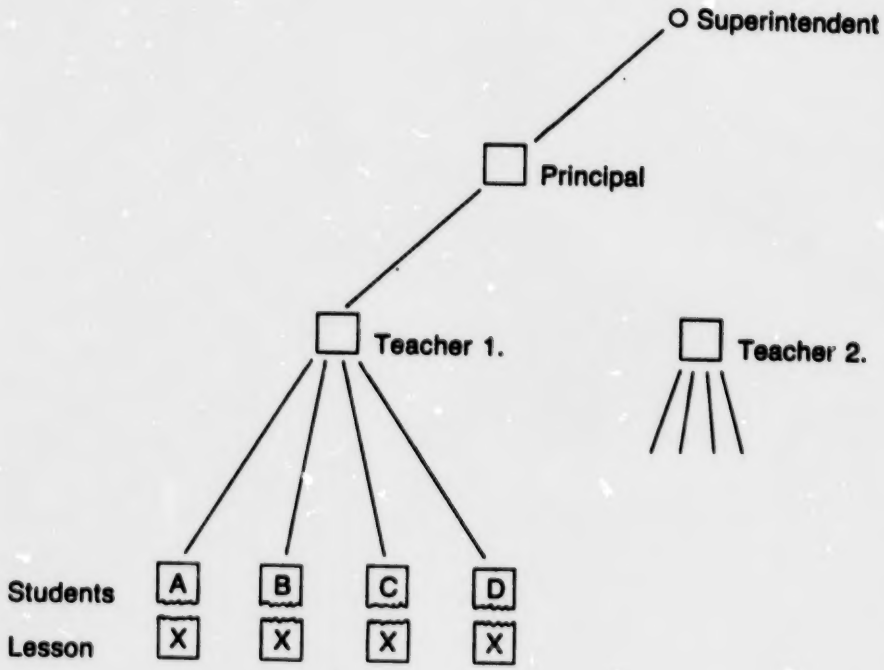
If we compare this structure with that of the traditional school, as illustrated in figure II, we begin to see the implications for group working as a process of learning. When responsibility is given to A, B, C and D to achieve an agreed goal, they must learn to share and to allocate all the requirements for control and coordination of the separate tasks, as well as learning more of the particular skills involved in each of the separate tasks. They must also learn to monitor and control the various contributions of their own membership and they must learn to organize the mutual support necessary to cope with fluctuations in individual task and work-flow requirements.

Figure I. Democratic or Self-Managing Work Group



People, ABCD, take shared responsibility for controlling and coordinating all tasks necessary to achieve section goal "G".

Figure II. Bureaucratic Education System



Teacher takes responsibility for the control and coordination of individual learning and behaviour; i.e. same role as supervisor or foreman in a work place.

As they are now all responsible for the achievement of the common goal they must also learn how to plan for and negotiate reasonable degrees of variety and freedom for themselves as individuals within any given set of circumstances, and learn when to re-negotiate this as those circumstances change. Part of this is simply learning how to tolerate their individual differences as people. Another part is learning what constitutes a fair system of rewards and punishments for them as a group. While the great majority of self-managing groups can never be fully autonomous, embedded as they usually are within a larger organization, within a larger society, the group must keep an eye open to its environment. Not only its immediate group environment with its housekeeping tasks but also its relations with adjacent groups.

This list is not exhaustive but it is sufficient to illustrate that the learning which is required of a self-managing group, as it evolves, is composed of several sorts of skills; essential task skills for getting the work done (on time and to agreed specifications); perceptual skills in extracting information from the group's various environments and emotional skills to set and maintain a productive human atmosphere. Communications skills are partly perceptual and partly emotional. It is clear, however, that for a group to work effectively its members must communicate quickly, directly and openly. By treating each other as fully human, the members of a self-managing group constantly seek to transform their worklife space into a learning environment.

IV LEARNING TO GET STARTED

For more than thirty years these lessons have been learned, ignored or forgotten, and then rediscovered. Nowhere is this more evident than in starting up a QWL project. The initial stages are obviously critical for setting the tone and expectations of the future of the exercise, and it is in this phase that we see the greatest conflict in assumptions about how people learn. The first set of assumptions discussed in II (1) above often prevails, even in cases where the alternatives have been debated. The brainwashing has been too powerful for people to entertain the risk of a fully participative introduction. Unfortunately, by allowing our fears and doubts about ordinary human abilities to guide us here, we <u>are</u>, in fact, putting the program at risk.

It is, for example, only common sense that the people who are doing a particular job know more about that job, its disadvantages and its potential for improvement, than anybody else. It is also common sense that a union will know most about union concerns in a particular industry, or about union issues arising from QWL projects. Yet how often do we find one or both of the following courses of action being adopted immediately after a decision has been made to get started?

(1) Consultants will be called in to do a survey of the plant or organization. Using questionnaires, interviews, etc., they will extract information from a sample of personnel about a pre-determined set of issues and conditions. After duly counting and analysing, they will feed the results back to

the sponsoring body, the joint union/management steering committee, or the personnel itself. They will probably include a series of recommendations for future action. These may go as far as a new organizational design for group working, vertical and horizontal coordination, perhaps corporate planning, etc. In other words, a blueprint or prescription for the future.

(2) Consultants will be called on to design and recommend a training course to prepare the ground (the people) for the introduction of the QWL program proper. They may recommend subcontractors for various parts of the program or they may conduct it themselves. But, almost inevitably, it will contain segments to promote 'interpersonal learning,' 'human relations,' or 'group dynamics.' It may also include sessions which outline various theories of social change or perhaps work through a series of classical case studies in QWL. Alternatively, various components of a training program may be organized around the introduction of the prepared design. Such integrated training may end with some modification of the pre-packaged design after those who are going to have to work in it have had a chance to comment.

Apart from the fact that most, if not all, of this training is unnecessary, let us consider its implications for the rest of the project in terms of the implicit messages which it conveys. The first message is that QWL is something for which we must be carefully prepared, i.e. "Human communication is a pretty tricky and complex business and therefore democratic group working may entail unknown risks." Secondly, there is a message that QWL

improvement and re-design must be done by experts in the field. These messages serve to reinforce the notion that people cannot make sense of their own experiences. Although springing from the best of intentions, they will in the long or short term, work against the healthy evolution of any attempt to improve QWL.

Reactions to such messages appear to be basically twofold. As one would expect, there are some who, without having developed a fully-fledged 'hatred of learning,' still see the need for expert guidance. This mode is dependent and presents a problem in the long term. When this attitude is confirmed and reinforced in a QWL project, a barrier is immediately set against rapid and adaptive self-management. Consultants, as advisors and facilitators, will be constantly required to sort out complications and negotiate further evolutionary steps. Eventually such a state of mind may disappear but the process has been prolonged. The cost of this approach, in both human and other currencies, must be queried.

The second common reaction to such training has effects which are frequently more dramatic, open and short term. They can sometimes disrupt or close down a QWL program. If they do not surface during the training course, or if they do surface but are ignored they will certainly re-emerge at some point after implementation has begun.

At the lowest level of reaction there is skepticism and cynicism about the use of the training and the ends which it serves. There may be rumblings such as, "Well, we could have told them

that, for a lot less money," and further, "Why don't you just let us get on with it." Further again, "If they're so smart, why don't they go and do it themselves!" These are reactions from people who have retained a sense of their dignity and worth, and while they auger well for the success of QWL in the long term, it is unfortunate that this vitality need be put to adversarial ends. Common to both the more dependent and the independent reactions is a deeper observation, i.e. "Not much has really changed." Expectations about QWL generally include a hope or fear that something fairly fundamental will change. When confronted with the traditional academic, or at best consultative, mode of training, participants may experience disappointment or relief, but not joy. Something of the sense of challege has already dissipated.

The safest and wisest approach to starting up a project is to assume that all those involved have the motivation, the skills and the experience to successfully embark upon it. This assumption, translated into a practical learning experience, will be rewarded by an immediate increase in energy, common sense and goodwill. Once people are convinced that they are perceived as genuine and responsible partners in an important venture, they will be quick to identify learning and/or training needs as they emerge. Because it is self-initiated, and therefore wanted, this additional help will not cause resentment or be viewed as an imposition. Unless, of course, somebody falls into the trap of assuming that if help has been requested, then there must be little bottles to be filled up.

(3) Participative Design

The practical learning experience which has been found to be most effective at start up is called "Participative Design" (Emery & Emery, 1974, 1975) and consists of several elements. It must include some teaching in the form of a briefing about the simple practical tools that natural work groups will need to use in order to re-design and evaluate their own work. One set of these, the structural building blocks of an organization, is illustrated in figures I and II. The others, and a more detailed description of the whole process, can be found in Participative Design: Work and Community Life (Emery & Emery, 1974).

Using these tools and their first hand experience of their own jobs, the groups proceed to:

(i) analyse how the whole job is now done;
(ii) assess how far this falls short of meeting their human requirements;
(iii) re-design the way the work is done to improve its quality, if they decide this is necessary, and
(iv) work out how the new design could be implemented through a continuous and participative learning process.

In the process of doing this, they are already learning how to work as a self-managing (learning) group. These design groups need neither leaders nor facilitators. They may, however, need experienced people to act as resources when questions and problems arise, and these should be on hand. This mode is

collaborative. Its characteristic features are a willingness to be open and to be explicit about personal values and purposes so that mutual trust may develop. At one level this amounts to a test for the consultant - the dilemma for them is whether or not they can practise what they preach.

Under certain conditions then, people will willingly accept assistance. The more the workplace is their own, based upon their design which has taken into account their people in their circumstances, the greater the effort they will put into making it work. And they may even enjoy doing it.

There is no space here for all the details and qualifications required for a full picture. However, experience has shown that the more we move our thinking and behaviour from the training end of the scale towards the learning end, the more we improve the quality of our working lives.

IV LEARNING OR TRAINING?

While the development of participative design has shown that learning is the key dimension in QWL there is still debate and confusion as to the various roles that learning and training may need to play in various stages of a project and in relation to differing skills and sectors. Before citing specific examples, it may be useful to identify different types of learning and training.

In folk-lore and modern usage a distinction between education or learning, and training has been maintained. We may train a prize fighter or a sheep dog; we attempt to educate a person. We train

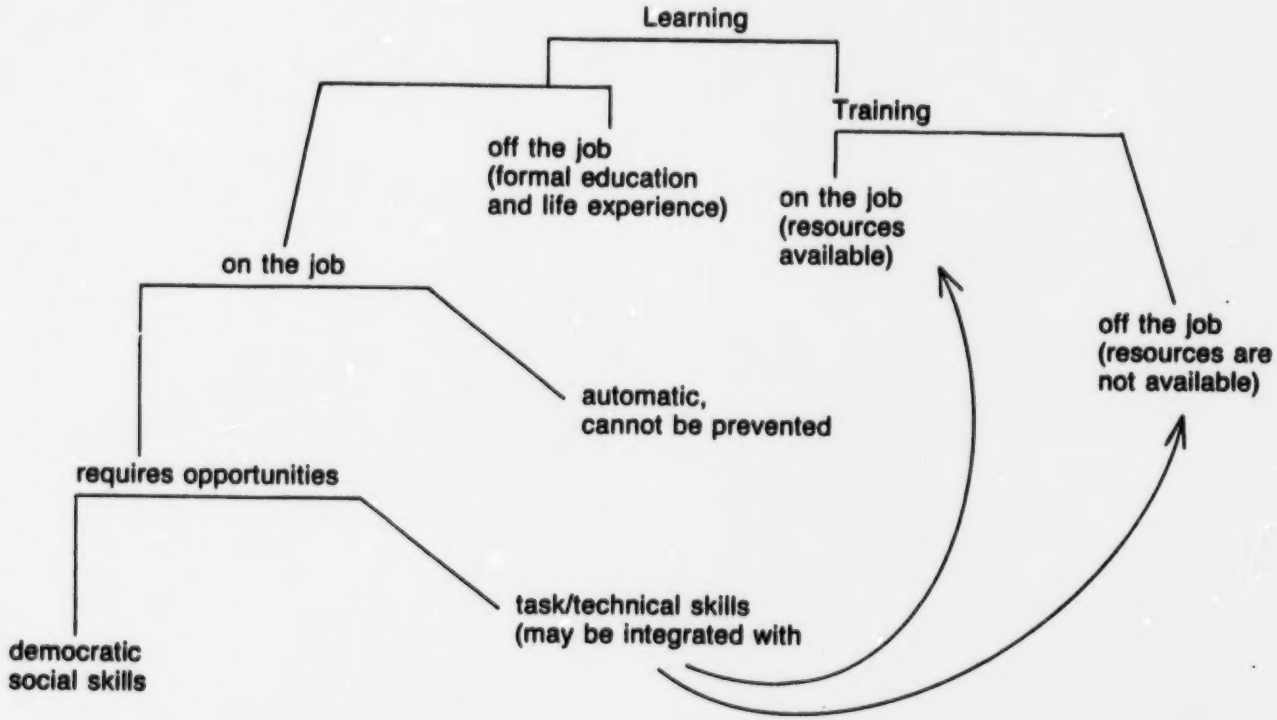
people to do those things which they will need to do in particular circumstances; e.g. "Keep your guard up;" and, "Do not press button B while red light is on." We educate people for future adaptability, as reflected in such sayings as, "You will never know when it will stand you in good stead;" and, "Knowledge is power."

As figure III shows, training may be subdivided into "on" and "off" the job. Choosing between these will depend primarily upon the resources at hand and upon a variety of constraints imposed by regulation, economics or convention. All else being equal, there are advantages to training on the job.

Learning may be similarly subdivided, but here we must also distinguish between learning which will automatically happen because it cannot be prevented, and learning for which deliberate opportunities must be provided. That learning which cannot be prevented because of our human nature, includes our ability to 'read' the meaning of non-verbal communications such as body language, facial expressions and social structure. For example, people are rarely in doubt as to whether they are involved in a relationship of equality or one of superiority-subordination.

However, opportunities must be provided in our present society for two other sorts of learning. The first, which we will call 'skills for democracy,' includes learning to get along with each other, working as a team, making sensible decisions, gaining a better sense of social justice and becoming more task-oriented and purposeful. As our culture has encouraged individualism, isolation and apathy (Pawley, 1973) so have we become relatively

Figure III. The Relationship between Learning and Training



deskilled in these human abilities.

Secondly, deliberate opportunities must be provided on the job for acquiring a wide range of skills. These opportunities include: rotation of particular tasks or practice on various machines; informal apprenticeships whereby the trainee progresses through observation, tackling simple parts of the job, and skilled craftsperson level, and providing time for discussion to increase understanding of procedures and/or policies.

Learning off the job today must be regarded as an influence on life at work and not simply as gaining a qualification. Increasingly, the environment or social field beyond the formal boundary of an organization intrudes through the attitudes and values of various members, formed through experiences in democratic family or community settings (Emery F. 1978, Jones 1980, Gilmore, 1982). This exerts further pressure towards genuine group working. Trends within and without the workplace are mutually reinforcing (Naisbitt, 1982).

As well as these more traditional forms of learning and training, there is a wide range of activities available, simulations or games which can claim to develop awareness and skills in management, supervision and in improving QWL.

(1) Communication and Decision making Skills.

"If only we could learn to communicate better." It is in this area that most frequent misunderstandings occur and where the greatest amount of unnecessary training is carried out. This training and/or game playing goes by

such names as sensitivity training, team building, and communication skills training. The myth about its effectiveness and necessity for those who are in the process of improving their QWL arises more from faulty assumptions about how people learn than it does from any hard evidence (Back, 1972). In the many projects with which I have been associated, the need to engage in such training has been negligible. In fact, once the group system is underway, people simply begin to speak and to relate to each other in ways previously inconceivable in the old bureaucratic structure.

We prefer to maximize positive feelings and minimize negative ones, but when one person is pitted against another, the negative must predominate with all the damage that this does to the quality of communication. We are built to be excellent communicators but we need the appropriate conditions in order to show how good we are. Participating as equals in a common task with shared purposes approximates the ideal condition. As we get used to this condition and confidence grows, communications radically improve and we experience interpersonal relations as a source of pleasure.

Apart from the fact that much of this training is unnecessary, there are other basic problems in this approach. First, some of these games must be played with fierce competitiveness, in order for one to become aware of the dynamics involved. This competitiveness is not in line with the values and aims of QWL. Second, those

methods which increase sensitivity to others are often found to be useless once the people return to the actual workplace where nothing else has changed. Learning from such game playing is lost unless the structure of the relationships on the job is changed to encourage its transfer. Third, we simply do not need to be taught how to be nice to each other. Fourth, some of this training implies that nothing can ever be changed and that we must simply learn better ways of coping with our situation. Living with stress appears to be a fashionable theme at the moment. Promoting such an attitude is particularly dangerous in the midst of a QWL improvement project. Getting a QWL project off the ground can be difficult even with high levels of hope for substantial change.

However, some games designed to teach straight material about, for example, how the stock market works, can be useful. My message is: if you feel you must use a game or simulation, choose it carefully, and ensure in advance, that the learning can be applied in reality.

(2) Managerial Skills.

In many ways, this is a central part of communication and decision-making skills, but the term is often used to include accounting procedures or sophisticated management information systems.

When a self-managing group is formed, it will need not only more explicitly agreed-upon procedures and

guidelines than were previously necessary, it may also need more information than its individual members collectively have in order to be effectively self-managing. This is because the simple and effective self-regulatory properties of face-to-face work groups are inadequate to accomplish the task of co-ordination and control when the group is spread over shifts or geographically dispersed. Such conditions are characteristic of continuous process, capital-intensive industries. They will be even more prevalent given the current investment in new technologies in all sectors of the economy. Since the nature of the information required is about agreed objectives and performances (not just output levels) self-managing, rather than semi-autonomous, has become the more appropriate term.

In order to learn how effectively to use an integrated information system, the group must accept responsibility for the achievement of group objectives. Once the responsibility is accepted it is then a matter of ensuring that workers have the ability to understand what is conveyed by the system and an ability to learn from what is understood. This will undoubtedly require a mixture of on and off the job training. Insofar as the information system is monitoring a complex operating system, we are referring not to training but to polytechnical education. The start up of a mining and mill operation in 1978, for example, required 500 hours of formal classroom education for operators (Emery, F. 1980).

Effective use of this knowlege and information cannot, however, be taken for granted, nor can one place total responsibility for combining these with experts outside the group. It is necessary for the group to have the means and the skill to monitor its work, with at least the proficiency that in past decades was shown by quality control engineers and production planners. Fortunately, the growth in computer-assisted analyzers has made this possible.

At the top level of management in an enterprise there is often a need for some additional learning and training after a QWL program has been initiated. Before start up, managers may often have been no more than administrators, engaged in 'busy work.' To effectively manage their boundaries they may need help in exploring the other sides of those boundaries. This is in the form of training to better exploit the evidence of their senses, and is further discussed under (3) perceptual skills. This demonstrates the fact that better management, and more management is self-management.

(3) Perceptual skills.

The answer to upgrading the performance of these skills is essentially the same as that discussed under (1) communication and decision-making, and for the same reasons. Given appropriate circumstances, people will automatically become more aware of their experiences and place more faith in the lessons drawn from them.

There is, however, one exception. There will certainly be times when some part of an organization, or the whole of a small organization, will feel the need to set aside some time to plan. For their planning to be maximally effective, they must take into account the nature of the world in which they are working and planning; the direction in which it appears to be heading ; its trends (some of which are sure to touch upon the purposes of the group); and the opportunities those trends may present to the organization.

This task is not difficult: it entails constructing pictures from the observations that we make about small, but significant, changes taking place around us. But, our culture has been notably deficient in helping us to learn how to make sense of this information. Thus an organization or group will almost certainly need outside help in creating the appropriate learning environment for this phase of their planning, at least for the first time. This experience is one that does not fit neatly into our classification of learning and training as it consists of a participative process through which we deliberately train ourselves to extract and creatively use more of the perceptual information we automatically and often unconsciously collect (Emery, M. 1976, 1982).

(4) Task/Technical or Hard Information

The relevance of learning or training in these areas

depends entirely on the nature of the work setting. Some examples are as follows:

If an office can function effectively only when one of its members becomes an efficient typist, then the obvious course of action is to arrange for somebody to attend a typing or word processor course.

A receptionist to a professional practitioner will need, amongst other things, a quick eye to spot clients who may require special or emergency attention. While some basic background and pointers will help the new recruit initially, this aspect of reception primarily requires innate qualities and experience. With time, people in such positions often decide to broaden their range of skills or upgrade their qualifications to profession entry standards.

In various types of assembly work nothing more than a set of simple demonstrations by an experienced person is required, followed by a minimum of practise.

As in the example above, when a greenfield zinc mine and mill was planned in a predominantly rural area it was considered necessary for the future staff to undergo intensive training about the nature of the materials and high technology processes with which they would be working. Increasingly, with structural and technological change, such costs will arise.

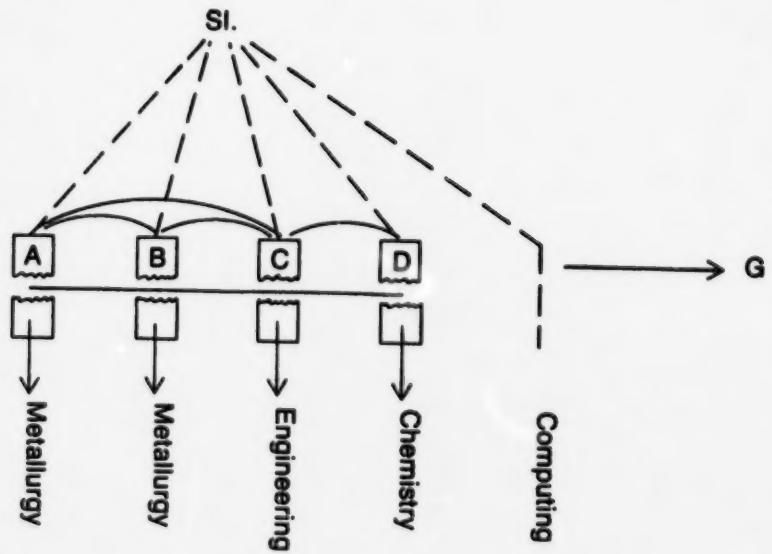
(5) <u>The case where it is not Possible to be Multi-skilled</u>.

There are special cases where multi-skilling, or learning each other's jobs is either simply impossible or just not a currently feasible proposition. The example in figure

IV shows a group composed of highly trained specialists. Multi-skilling is not a possiblity but they are still required to take responsibility for the effective coordination of their activities as a group. They could not, however, be expected to jointly control each other's jobs. The engineer must accept individual responsibility for his/her particular contribution as must the chemist for his or hers. Should the group not meet its goals, the director must step in.

This modified model of group work would appear to present more difficulty, particularly in the area of communication for effective coordination. To the contrary, it does not. The reason that this model does not present overwhelming difficulty, is clear. When people perceive that it is in their best interests to communicate simply and openly, they can and will do so. Between highly trained specialists and across demarcation lines, information will be transferred. But, it will be transferred largely in the form of conversation to solve a problem or explore a puzzle. Specific off the job training may be requested but it is not common once the group system is functioning well. In the course of these work conversations, some mini-lectures may be delivered, but they will be accepted in the spirit in which they are offered; as an aid to mutual understanding and a job well done.

Figure IV. Self Managing Group without Multi-skilling



ABCD control tasks in their own specialization but are jointly responsible for coordination to achieve "G".

(6) Change during QWL.

During the evolution of any QWL project today it is highly likely that new technology will be introduced and that there will be some staff turnover. In the case of new 'high' or electronic technology an external training program may be needed, followed by a deliberate program of learning or training on the job. New staff should have been informed by advertisement or at interview that the 'job' involves participation and democratic practices. Once the member is at the job she/he must be carefully inducted into the day-to-day realities of participation, particularly into those mechanisms for effective coordination.

(7) Group negotiating.

Groups often become involved in, or the focus of, union-management discussions and negotiations. They may initiate their own claims, via the union, to share productivity gains arising from an effective re-design, or to achieve other improvements relating to conditions or multi-skilling.

One or two members of a work group should be aware of, or skilled in, such negotiations. If not, they would do well to attend a training course about such matters. In Australia, the national Trade Union Training Authority (TUTA) runs such courses, increasingly in a participative style so that previous learning from on-the-job experiences of negotiating one's own time and responsibility can be incorporated into a richer learning

experience for all those involved.

VI IMPLEMENTATION TODAY: A FUNDAMENTAL DIFFICULTY

One problem which is commonly encountered in QWL projects alerts us to a very real difference in the consequences of learning from experience and teaching (training) by experts. It is known as the 'hatred of learning' (Bion, 1959). Some people have been so damaged by their experiences at school, at home and in bureaucratized work-places that when invited to participate in creating a genuine learning environment they feel anxiety or fear.

This expresses itself in various ways (Williams, 1982). Having lost confidence in themselves as full human beings, and in the validity of their own experiences, unable to take risks, unable to experience joy through working as an equal in a cohesive group of equals, they will argue for their place in the old structure; that in which they could be dependent. Some will be more forceful. Convinced of their belief in the virtues and the necessity of a dominant hierarchy, they may attempt to subtly or otherwise sabotage the entire QWL project. Those who can no longer take initiatives, only orders, can visually be accommodated within a participatively re-design structure. Those of a more aggressive disposition must be dealt with before too much damage is done. In these cases counselling is a first resort but has frequently been found to be largely ineffective.

The fear, or hatred of learning, shows that our special abilities

to perceive, know and communicate are vulnerable. If not practised, they will be attenuated. Bureaucratic structures discourage such practice with the result that many people drift, either towards autonomy or independence without genuine relatedness, or towards submerging themselves in a group. Either way, they lose that vital balance between the individual and the group which is necessary for mature human adaptation and well-being.

On the other hand, the 'hatred of learning' confirms the converse: group working encourages the use of these special human abilities, and generates energy and confidence for more creative learning by indiviudals for shared purposes. It is a vicious cycle. We learn to participate by participating, and by participating, generate a greater desire to learn. The product of work is people: the higher the quality of life at work, the higher the quality of the life.

VII SUMMARY

This has been a sample rather than a survey of the needs for learning and training in QWL. Such few pages cannot hope to convey the richness of experience that has been accumulated from many diverse initiatives. The interested reader should consult the range of case literature in order to obtain the full flavour of this smorgasbord. However, despite the array of dishes on this table certain nutritional lessons have been learned through time and across cultures.

My focus here, has been upon our most basic assumptions about

ourselves as human learners, faced with the 'challenge of change.' How do we translate new perceptions and new knowledge into workable practices that enhance our dignity and adaptiveness? The answer I have given is simply that, when given a choice, most people can better learn from their own experience, and from that of their peers, than from an expert. In other words, people do place substantial trust in "common sense." Perhaps only two further points need to be made to reinforce the message of this paper.

(1) Evaluation

It is always necessary to include a note about evaluation in this context because it has been so mystified as to be almost useless. In reality, it is simply not necessary for teams of researchers to crawl all over QWL sites, attempting to measure how much people have learned or how much has been changed. If the change to self-management has in any way been accomplished, the changes will be obvious, sometimes dramatically so.

Changes in interpersonal relations have been mentioned. Equally obvious, are the changes to what is known as 'housekeeping.' When people accept responsibility for their workplace, it takes on the characteristics of a home. As people will care for their homes, so will they care for their workplace. It will become cleaner, tidier and better arranged to facilitate the flow of work. The benefits are quite direct; an increase in the level of occupational health and a decrease in accidents. When people feel they are merely travelling from one home to another,

the rate of absenteeism will be down. All of these are reliable guides to the extent of change and the fact that people are learning to accept and share their responsibilities.

If it is felt necessary to delve more deeply, one may ask groups to rate themselves against the standard set of criteria for job satisfacton. But there is a problem with this method: as the quality of the day-to-day experience increases, so do people see more ways in which to further improve it. It is therefore difficult to ever rate onself at the top end of the scale.

As we have found with training, the needs for sophisticated evaluation of QWL have been seriously over estimated.

(2) The future of learning and training

It is obvious at this time of writing that, economically, things are going from bad to worse. The storm clouds and gloom continue to gather. The recovery may not be just around the corner. Indeed as we consider the four previous waves of boom and bust, the Kondratiev cycles,[1] we note that each depression has been both deeper and longer than the preceding one (Emery, F. 1978, 1980). (See Figure V). Some corporations will go under because

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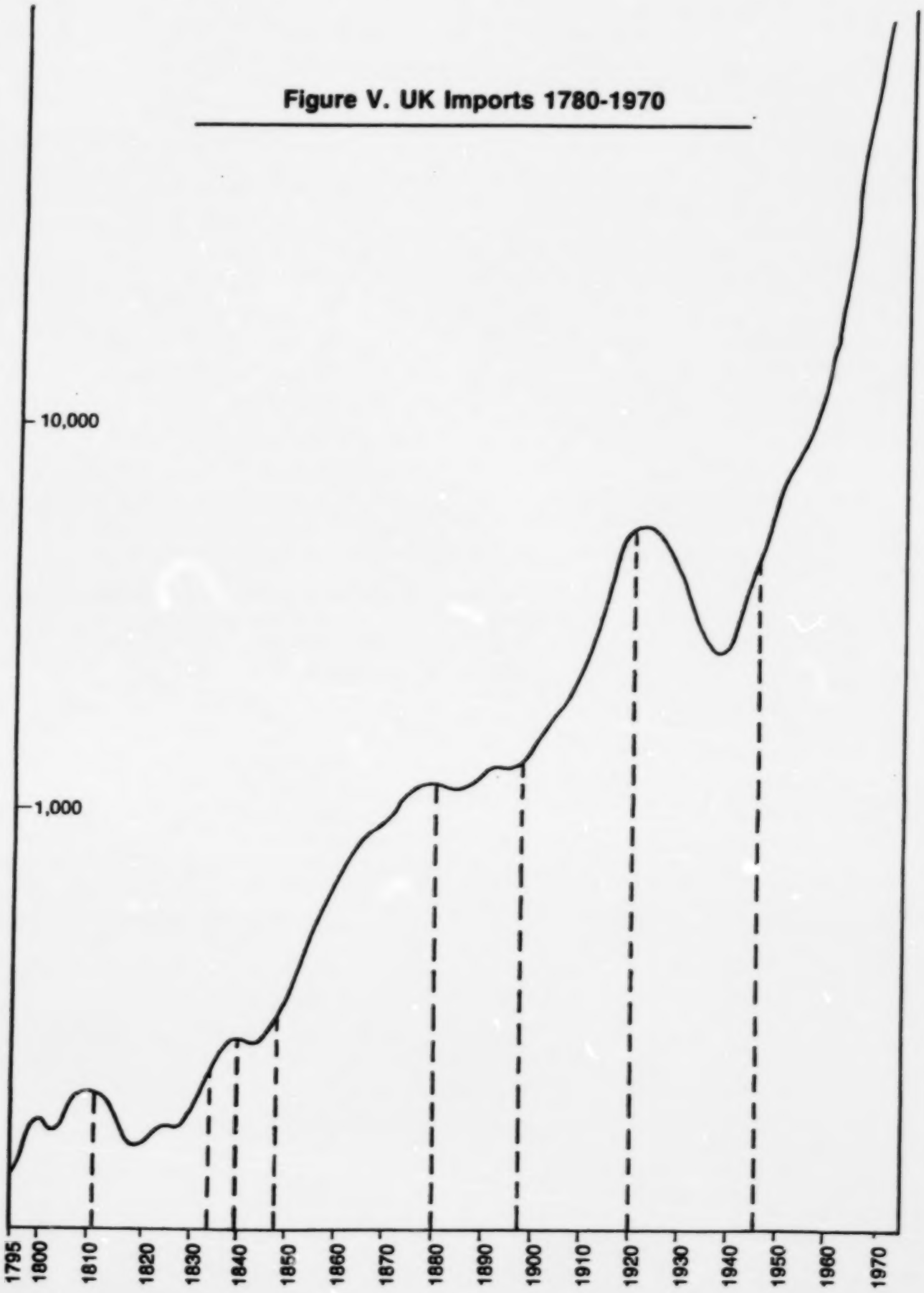
1. Kondratiev was the early Russian economist who first postulated the existence of long (50-year) waves or cycles of boom and bust in the world economy. He went to Siberia for his trouble. Recently, his work has been revived and taken seriously.

Figure V. UK Imports 1780-1970



they find themselves competing in the wrong markets, many more will go under because their costs of production are above average for their market. QWL is a sure way of containing costs but it too must be stripped of all unnecessary expenses.

To pull out of each of these previous depressions three things have been needed:

- a new technology for the creation of new markets or for cheaper production to service existing markets,
- a new and cost-reducing energy source,
- a new form of organization at the work face.

Such new technology is available in the microprocessor. But if, in order to pull out of this depression, we need to achieve rates of economic growth as seen in the fifties and sixties, then we are lacking an energy source which will double in its availability every seven or eight years. This does not mean that we are doomed to live in darkness, only that we cannot crank up the great industrial machine.

Should this prove to be a basically accurate picture of what is to come, more weight is placed upon the third factor in the equation - the new form of work organization, the core of the concept of QWL. As the learning from involvement in a QWL program is transferred to other areas of life, generating energy and motivation to develop and re-develop communities, so we will see the need to invest more of our scarce resources in QWL and QWL ventures. Simultaneously, we must reduce the cost of those ventures. One immediately available way of beginning is to shift

the balance from training to learning, from expert knowledge to common sense; in so doing, we will not only reduce the conventional cost, we will also increase our human capital and invest in the future.

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